2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5



particular villages and timed their different activities (cf. Appendix, Table E).

The conditions of work in this area were particularly favourable from some points of view. The Bemba live in communities of thirty to fifty huts. These are not surrounded by any kind of enclosure and most of the cooking, eating, dancing, quarrelling, and children's play take place out of doors. Hence by placing my tent in the middle of a village, I could watch the people's activities going on around me. I never slept in a native hut but think I observed as much or more from my point of vantage. Kinship patterns and the interplay of individual character—factors that also influence economic co-operation and food distribution—stood out clearly in settlements of this size. I reckoned to spend three to six weeks in each village. The type of chieftainship—the dominant institution in this culture—necessitated my travelling rather extensively from district to district in order to complete a study of ritual and political forms. These visits to different villages from one end of the country to another were valuable from an agricultural point of view since they showed me the range of local variation in cultivation and gave me comparative material on the social and economic changes introduced into Bemba villages by European contacts of different types.[1] But a nutrition expert making a quantitative study of diet would probably have collected more valuable material by staying in one village throughout the whole year.

I worked throughout in the native language as this was essential in this particular area. I therefore had to give up a month entirely to linguistic work on my arrival, and spent at least three before I was able to question informants with any success.[2] The actual

[1] Cf. my 'Anthropological Problems in North-Eastern Rhodesia', *Africa*, 1932, vol. v, and 'The Village Census in the Study of Contact Problems', ibid., 1935, vol. viii.

Longer visits were made to villages selected from four different administrative districts, i.e. visits of one to two months in the following: Chiefs' villages—Citimukulu, Mwamba, Nkula, Candamukulu, Matipa on Cilubi Island; and commoners' villages, *Chinsali district*—Pambalasa, Kachienja, Kasaka, Kasakatula; *Mpika district*—Shilusuko; *Kasama district*—Kungu, Mubanga, Kampamba. Visits of one week to three weeks: Chiefs' villages—Makassa, Nkolemfumu, Mwaba, Lucembe, Shimwalule, and commoner's villages, *Mpika district*—Kapongolo; *Kasama district*—Cimba, Citikafula, Molema.

[2] Some grammars and vocabularies exist. W. Lammond, *A Short Grammar of Chibemba*, 1926; *Bemba–English Vocabulary*, 1926; E. B. H. Goodall, *Some Wemba Words*, 1921; P. Guillermé, *Dictionnaire Français–Chibemba*, 1920.

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5



weighing of food and other records of the same type could no doubt have been made with the aid of an interpreter, but the general anthropological study, on which I was principally engaged, necessitated considerable linguistic knowledge, and on the nutritional aspect I had to be able not only to question natives but to listen to their talk when eating and drinking, and to participate in their domestic life.

I travelled with two servants, both members of the tribe, a cook and a small boy, and occasionally invited notables, royal women or members of the chief's council to go on journeys with me to make contacts easier.[1] I moved by bicycle and carriers, but dismissed the latter on arrival at each village in order not to disturb the ordinary course of village life more than necessary. It was superficially easy to mix with the people and join in their activities, since they are naturally courteous and have a great tradition of respect for authority. I was evidently considered an economic asset to a village[2] and a source of amusement and interest in a rather uneventful life, and was therefore tolerated, and even welcomed, from the start, in huts and on expeditions to gardens or fishing pools. The women, with whom I spent the greater part of the day, were far less in awe of the European than the men, who had so much more practical experience of the white man's power. But time served to show the deep reticences of the people, especially with regard to their ritual life. I was only able to attend religious ceremonies after considerable difficulties, and when I had finally won the confidence of the Paramount and other chiefs. These difficulties do not concern us, however, in the present book, since when discussing their foods and their gardens the people were ready and even enthusiastic informants. But there is no doubt that in an area where the only white people consist of three main classes—Government officials, missionaries, and traders—and where the tribe itself is organized on an autocratic basis, the anthropologist will find it impossible to be treated as an equal by the natives. I was able to

[1] I believe educated natives could have been used to keep many of the records, but the standard of education is backward in this area compared to that in S. and E. Africa, and I was only able to find one who could help me for two or three months.

[2] I never paid for information, but I bought native produce, employed people occasionally, distributed snuff, meat, and occasionally beer, and also gave elementary medical help, and presents to chiefs or headmen as tribal etiquette demanded.

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
FQ5 Bemba FQ5



spread among surrounding peoples for much the same reasons.[1] In such cases it might be said that the secondary motives for holding ceremonies have become stronger than the primary. Among the Bemba no such phenomenon seems to occur, and secondary motives which were originally powerful are now no longer operative.

## DEDUCED ATTITUDES

Apart from the general functions of the chisungu in native eyes I have tried to deduce their attitude to different parts of the ceremony by noting the emphasis they give to them in straightforward narratives and the tension displayed by performers on different occasions and by analysing the time and energy spent. Such information does not, of course, exactly reflect the sentiments of the people concerned. Practical considerations and individual differences alter the emphasis in the case of a particular rite. One form of symbolic behaviour interests one mistress of the ceremonies, but does not attract some of her other colleagues. It would be necessary to use a questionnaire with a properly selected sample of individuals before saying confidently what 'the Bemba' think.

However, some of these clues are worth following up if only for the light they throw on the difficulties of studying ritual under field conditions.

Bemba descriptions of the chisungu given me before I had witnessed a ceremony, differ in a striking way from the account I have given. The omissions are so considerable that there is little correspondence between the sequence of events in the actual rite I witnessed and accounts given me in my first months of fieldwork, or even by *banacimbusa* after I had witnessed a ceremony.

Of course, the details of such rites are difficult for people to remember without recourse to a written record. It is not surprising that the most willing informants get confused and tend to confine themselves to events that are easily described or are thought likely to give the inquirer pleasure. Most of my informants were, moreover, women. Many Bemba men are experienced in classifying facts in a way convenient to the European, either because they have been to European schools or worked as

[1] J. D. and E. J. Krige, personal communication.

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
FQ5 Bemba FQ5



clerks or interpreters for Europeans, but most women are unused to this form of mental exercise.

It must be realized, too, that the sequence of events in a primitive ritual cannot be expected to be as regular as European religious sequences. Some ritual events logically follow each other, and no Bemba would think of reversing them; others depend on extraneous factors such as the presence of sufficient food at a given moment of time. The field-worker who is satisfied that he sees a magical connection between the order of two rites which he believes to be 'stages' of admission to this or that group, is often pulled up sharp by some matter of fact comment such as 'Of course we couldn't do it that day because *X*'s grain failed to germinate for the beer and she couldn't get any more'.

Accounts given to me during my first months in the country resembled this one: 'Oh they take the girl out into the bush. Then she (the girl) jumps over a hoop made of branches. Then she is carried back to the village by her father's sister and her grandmother and they make payments to the *nacimbusa*. . . . (Pause.) . . . They make much beer—rich people make very much beer for their daughters. Then in the night the bridegroom comes with his bow and arrow. He shoots at a mark on the wall. The women all clap and cry "He has hit the target". Then they give the girl her *mbusa*. She is rubbed with oil and put on a mat and they throw bracelets on her lap. The *nacimbusa* takes these.' It is of some interest that this account was given me early in my visit by Nangoshye, the mistress of the actual ceremony I saw, who could very well have given me a rather complete account.

Looking through similar narratives I find that all such accounts mention jumping over the hoop of branches and the shooting ceremony on the last night. A number record the catching of the water insects in the mouth. All end with the ceremony of public congratulation at the end. Most of them refer to the teaching of the girl. None of them however, mentions the gardening mimes or the teasing of the girls. It is difficult to say whether the informants gave the selected events because they were the least secret, or because they felt they would be least likely to shock Europeans, who are believed by the Bemba to have curious and unaccountable ideas about anything to do with sex, and to be